

BROOKLYN SURVEY

VINEGAR HILL

PROPOSED HISTORIC DISTRICT



N.Y.C. LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

305 BROADWAY

NEW YORK, N.Y. 10007

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James Dillon - Field Research
Peter Kunz - Photography
Sarah Landau (former staff member) - Field Research
Sarah Latham - Photography
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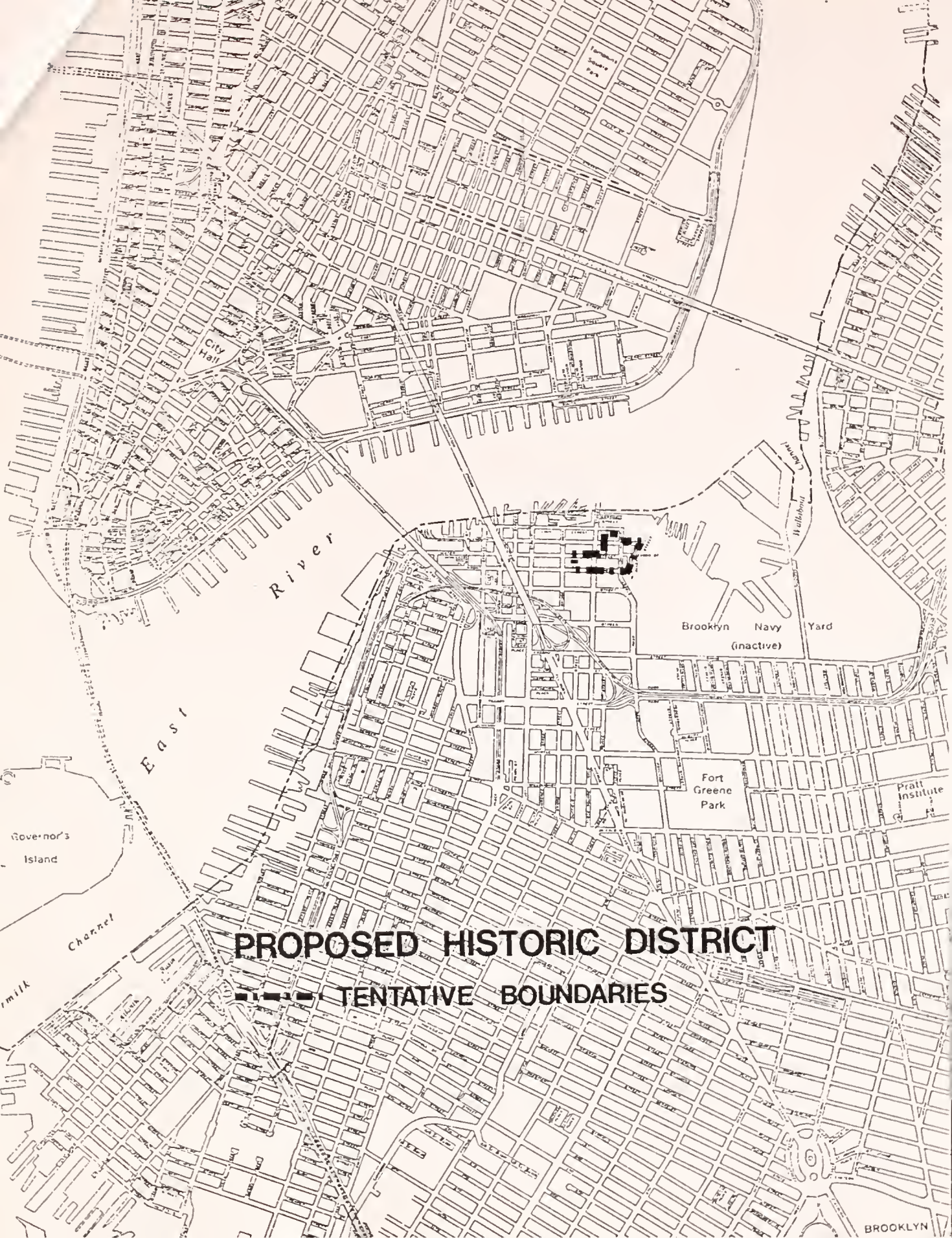
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PROPOSED HISTORIC DISTRICT

----- TENTATIVE BOUNDARIES

VINEGAR HILL - GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Vinegar Hill is a small remnant of one of the active and bustling neighborhoods which once surrounded the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Located just west of the Navy Yard on the East River shore, the district is made up mostly of mid-nineteenth century row houses, many with later nineteenth century storefronts.

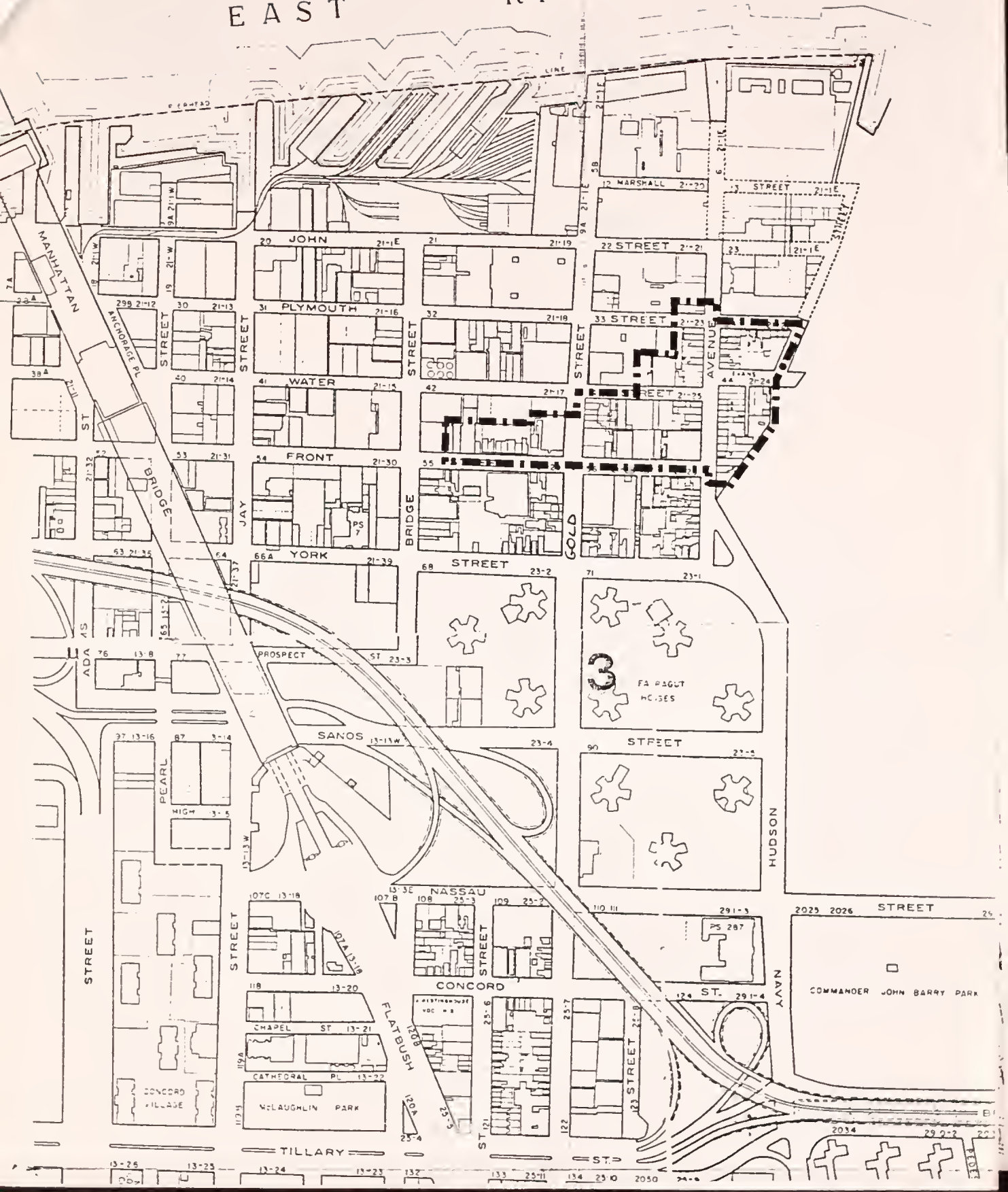
Vinegar Hill is a low scale residential neighborhood surrounded by taller industrial buildings, the Navy Yard and a high rise housing project - the Faragut Houses. It is roughly bound by the East River on the north, York Street on the south, the Navy Yard on the east and Bridge Street on the west.

The study area is bound by Plymouth Street on the north, Front Street on the south, the Navy Yard on the east and Bridge Street on the west. This area contains a mix of architecturally significant structures, later non-historical structures and cleared land.

It is zoned for manufacturing, with an M3 - 1 designation in the north half and an M1 - 2 in the south half. This exclusive manufacturing designation is meant to phase out residential use and is not conducive to preservation of the area. Mixed use zoning would be more appropriate here.

Vinegar Hill developed in the mid nineteenth century as a working class community of Irish immigrants and Navy Yard workers. The rows of houses along Hudson Avenue and Front Street range in age from the 1840's through the later nineteenth century. Many of the houses exhibit a simple late Greek Revival style.

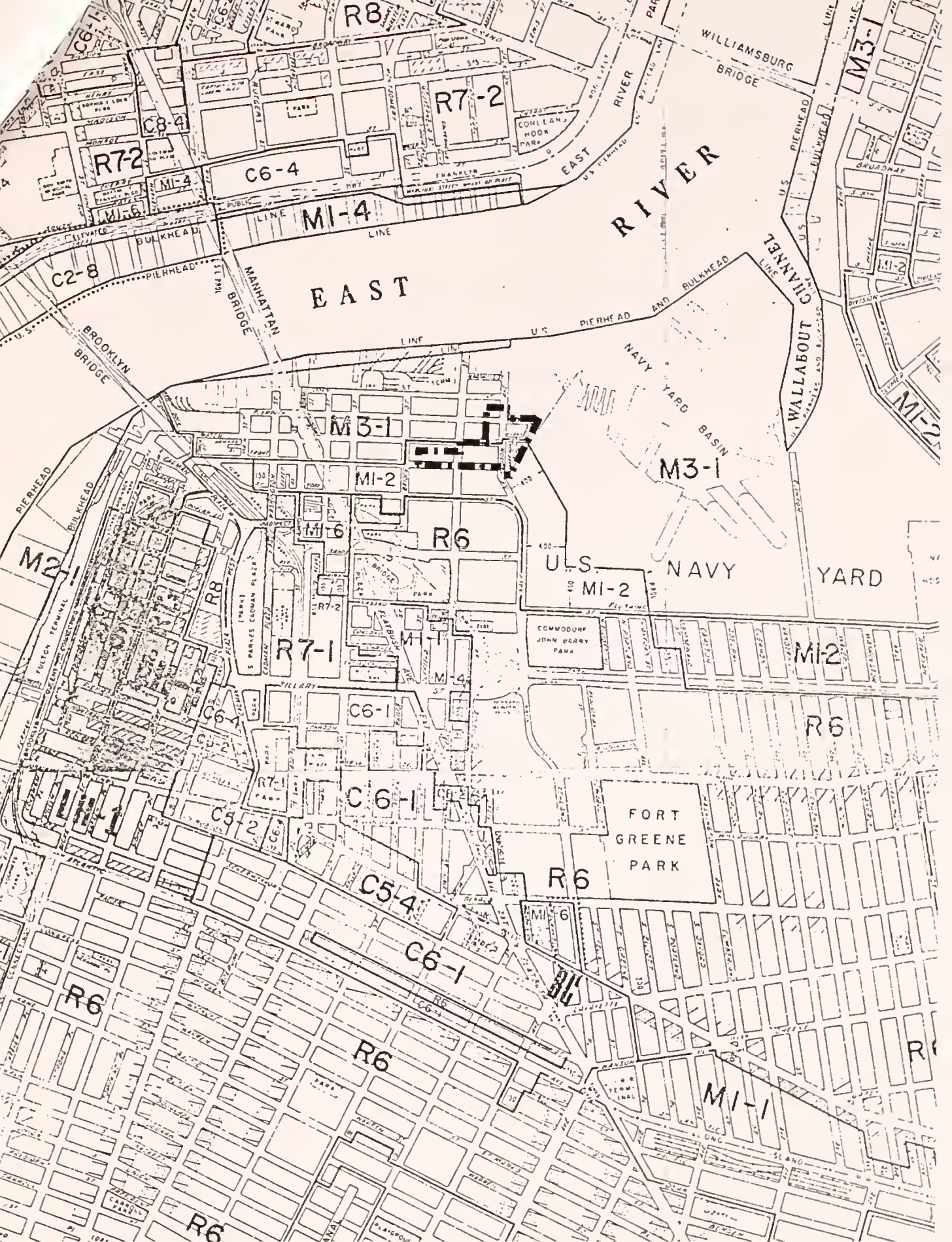
EAST RIVER



The Vinegar Hill study area is a small residential section of two and three story houses, surrounded by industrial buildings. Farragut Houses, a public housing project, reaches up to the corner of Gold Street and Hudson Avenue, just a block from the study area's southern boundary.

Most of the two and three story residential buildings in the study area are occupied by two families, usually the owner and one tenant. Renovation and rehabilitation of the housing stock is much in evidence, particularly along Hudson and Gold Streets. According to the priest at St. Ann's Church, which is the only community institution in the area, many of the recent building purchasers are white, middle-class professionals, who have recognized the value of these historic buildings and find the price of houses in this "undiscovered" neighborhood still moderate enough to warrant further investment for rehabilitation.

There are no formal neighborhood organizations in Vinegar Hill. A recent local concern has been the poor condition of the gas station lot at the corner of Gold and Front Streets. Meetings were held at St. Ann's to discuss possible concerted action but no definite plans were formulated.



VINEGAR HILL - HISTORY

Vinegar Hill is located just west of the Brooklyn Navy Yard in the easternmost section of the old Village of Brooklyn, along the East River shore. Granted to Edward Fiscock around 1640, this part of the Village of Brooklyn has been in use since then. It was called Martyn's Hook and had been composed of sand hills and a sandy beach at Water and Bridge Streets. In the very early 1800's, the ship and dock-builders of New York moored their timber rafts at this beach. Remsen's Mill was the main attraction of the area, with its complex of mill buildings, mill pond and dam. The mill was located just north of Hudson Street, on land now inside the Brooklyn Navy Yard. There was a toll bridge built over the mill pond, and this became a popular route to the Brooklyn Ferry, and Brooklyn village proper. The old route ran from what is now North Elliot Place, over the bridge, to Hudson Avenue and Sands Street. Travellers then took Sands Street into Brooklyn.

The history of this area is tied to the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Land for the yard was sold to the U.S. government by John Jackson in 1801. In 1817, Captain Samuel Evans opened a gate into the Navy Yard on the line of Water Street. The main gate of the yard has always been at Sands Street. The section of street which served as a path to the new Navy Yard gate is now called Evans Street, after the Captain, who was commandant of the Navy Yard. The Commandant's House, a designated New York City landmark is located directly behind Hudson Avenue just south of Evans Street. With the opening of the gate, a ferry service was established by John Little and Captain Evans. The ferry ran from Little Street in Brooklyn (named

after the ferryman) to Walnut Street in Manhattan. The ferry service was said to be established for the accomodation of the mechanics and others employed by the Navy Yard.

It is likely that the district was inhabited by the workers and associate personnel of the Navy Yard. With the impetus of the ferry, nearby industry, and the opening of the new Navy Yard gate, saloons, houses and gaming rooms were built. These structures were first concentrated around Little Street, from the dock to the Navy Yard gate. During this boom, real estate in the area commanded a better price than at Fulton Ferry.

Vinegar Hill was also the home of many of the newly arrived Irish immigrants. This whole area - from the River to beyond Sands Street, and from Fulton Street to the Navy Yard - was appropriately called Irishtown. This area was also a worker's community. In 1824, the Methodists erected a small wooden building on York Street, no longer standing today, for the use of the working people in this outlying part of the village. John Jackson, who sold part of his land to the Federal government, sold more of it in small parcels to Irish immigrants. To make the area more enticing, he named the land which he was parceling off Vinegar Hill, in honor of the last battle of the Irish Rebellion.

Vinegar Hill is only one name in a series given to this area. Today it is called, variously, Navy Yard, water front, old Brooklyn, and Fulton Ferry. In the 18th century, it was known as Olympia. Developers then hoped that the pleasant, hilly site would become a rival to Brooklyn Village. Rather than becoming a city, Olympia was engulfed by the Village of Brooklyn by the 1800's. Martynes Hook is another eighteenth century name, with geographic rather than mythological roots.

There were quite a few saloons and gaming houses in Vinegar Hill. It probably served as an entertainment district for the Navy Yard. This area never could rival the strip at Sands Street, though. Sands Street led from

the main gate of the Navy Yard, and was a major route to the Fulton Ferry. It was the red light district for the area, and was an extremely bustling street. Sands Street now contains a housing project, and serves as a thoroughfare for the Brooklyn Bridge. The Vinegar Hill district is the last remaining piece of the once lively community of Irishtown and the Navy Yard.

Vinegar Hill today is a quiet residential area within a larger industrial district. It contains a firehouse, a church and some brick row houses. There are still traces of more than the usual number of saloons, reminding us of its Navy Yard history. The structures span the entire nineteenth century, with many intact storefronts surviving.

VINEGAR HILL - ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Vinegar Hill's significant nineteenth century buildings center on Hudson and Front Streets, Gold to Bridge Streets and spill over onto a few streets radiating from these two main roads. The architecture is a mix of brick and frame row houses with a few non-historical structures in the area. A church, rectory and firehouse dominate the Front Street block.

The most interesting building type in the five block district is a late Greek Revival three story high brick row house with austere ornamentation. Stone slabs serve as lintels and sills and a plain dentilled cornice with a blank frieze tops the planar facade. Many of these houses have retained their slightly recessed, typically Greek Revival doorway. It is composed of a transom, sidelights and two wooden panelled pilasters flanking the door. The brick, which is very smooth and sharply defined at the edges, is laid up in a common bond with relatively narrow mortar joints. This treatment of brick was popular in the 1840's in the vernacular Greek Revival and transitional Italianate styles. The purpose was to keep the facades as smooth and flat as possible. Many of these houses have later nineteenth century storefronts. Row houses of this type probably lined Hudson Avenue from Front Street to the shore. Good examples can be found at numbers 50 to 54 and 67 to 71 Hudson and at 71 to 75 Gold Street.

St. Ann's Church is the most outstanding single building in the district. Located on the north west corner of Front and Gold Streets, it faces south

onto Front. The church is a handsome and intact, although late, example of the Gothic vernacular style. It was designed in 1860 by P.C. Keeley, a Brooklyn Catholic Church architect. The austere brick church is rectangular in plan, with a tower rising from the center bay. The rectangular tower is topped by a long narrow conical roof. The facade is simple with very little exterior ornament. The central bay is emphasized by the use of buttresses which rise up to the tower. The windows on the facade are lancet arched and contain a grouping of lancet arched and multi-foiled rose windows. The doorway is treated in the same manner as the windows. St. Ann's Church is one of the few remaining all brick churches in Brooklyn, and its late Gothic vernacular style makes it rarer still.

The pointed arched windows and doorway of the rectory at number 351 Front Street complement the church next door. The rectory is a tall three story brick building over a basement. The arched stone door and window lintels, with their incised decoration, dominate the entire facade.

A red brick Italianate firehouse anchors the west section of Front Street, reflecting the mid-nineteenth century development of the community. The three story structure has retained the typical firehouse ground floor with its large rectangular central door which was used for equipment. The central door is flanked by a smaller door on the right and by a dispatcher's window on the left, in keeping with firehouse tradition. The arched windows on the upper floors are surrounded by projecting bricks while a bracketed cornice emphasises the curved lines of the building's Italianate motif.

The Vinegar Hill district contains the last remnants of the mid-nineteenth century community which surrounded the Navy Yard. Although the buildings within the area are not individually architecturally significant, as a group they represent vernacular building types which are quickly becoming extinct. Historically, Vinegar Hill represents the remains of a nineteenth

century working class community - a long neglected chapter in the study of architecture and of people. The district's close association with the Navy Yard, which played an important part in the history of Brooklyn as well as that of the United States, further increases its historical importance.

VINEGAR HILL - BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Weld, Ralph Foster, Brooklyn Village, New York: 1938

VINEGAR HILL

Elected Officials

U.S. Senators

Jacob K. Javits (R-L)
110 East 45 Street
New York, New York 10017 867-7777

Daniel P. Moynihan (D-L)
733 Third Avenue
New York, New York 10017 661-5150

U.S. Representative

#14 Frederick W. Richmond (D-L)
147 Montague Street
Brooklyn, New York 11201 522-7121

State Senator

#25 Carol Bellamy
270 Broadway Room 1002
New York, New York 10007 488-4691

State Assembly

#57 Harvey L. Strelzin (D-L)
253 Broadway
New York, New York 10007 233-0763

Borough President

Howard Golden
Borough Hall
Brooklyn, New York 11201 643-2051

Councilmembers-at-large

Robert S. Steingut (D)
City Council, City Hall
New York, New York 10007 566-0719

John F. Gangemi (R)
8302 - 13th Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11228 833-1706

Vinegar Hill

Elected Officials

Council Member

#29 Abraham G. Gerges
111 Court Street
Brooklyn, New York 11201

875-5200

VINEGAR HILL

CITY PUBLIC SERVICES

Community Planning Board #2

Father Walter C. Murphy, Chairman
Sacred Heart Church
41 Adelphi Street
Brooklyn, New York 11205

625-5115

District Service Cabinet

Brooklyn Office of the Department of City Planning

185 Montague Street, 7th Floor
Brooklyn, New York 11201
Victor L'Eplattenier, Planner

834-9875

Police

84th Precinct
301 Gold Street
Brooklyn, New York
William Nielson, Community Relations Officer 875-6811

Fire

Engine 207
Ladder 110
172-92 Tillary Street
Brooklyn, New York
George E. McGahan, Captain

Sanitation

Sanitation Garage #30A
87 Columbia Street
Brooklyn, New York
G. Tlumeri, Foreman

522-4482

Vinegar Hill

City Public Services

District Health Center

Fort Greene D.H.C.
295 Flatbush Avenue, Extension
Brooklyn, New York 11201
Seymour Manoff, Director 643-8934

Health Care Facilities

Cumberland Hospital
39 Auburn Place
Brooklyn, New York
Inder Persand, Executive Director 625-1880

Library

Walt Whitman Branch
93 St. Edwards Street
Brooklyn, New York
Marvin Longton, Librarian 855-1508

Public Schools

School District 13
44 Court Street
Brooklyn, New York
Dr. J. Jerome Harris, Superintendent 834-6700
Mrs. Wilma Maynard, Chairman, School Board

P.S. 8
37 Hicks Street
Brooklyn, New York 11201
Blanche Kasindorf, Principal 834-6740

J.H.S. 265
101 Park Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11205
Philip Cox, Principal 834-6947

VINEGAR HILL

Private Schools

Gold Street Elementary School
(7th Day Adventists)
201 Gold Street
Brooklyn, New York
Dr. M.E. Russell, Principal

858-1439

Religious Institutions

St. Ann's Church
251 Front Street
Brooklyn, New York
Father Mannion

625-5855

Banks

Manufacturers Hanover Trust Co.
210 Flushing Avenue
Brooklyn, New York
A. Charriec, Branch Manager

UL5-0020

Private Funds

2012 Street Elementary School
 1575 Oak Avenue
 100-0000
 Brooklyn, New York
 100-0000

Religious Institutions

St. Ann's Church
 101 East Street
 Brooklyn, New York
 100-0000

Other

Mount Mary School 100-0000
 100-0000
 Brooklyn, New York
 100-0000